THE CAYAPA INDIANS*

by

Max Heimann

101 In the far north west of the Ecuadorian Republic there is a river
131 named the Santiago. Near the village of Borbon it is joined by
133 one of its tributaries, the Cayapa River. The Cayapa Indians, a
161 harmless tribe consisting of no more than 2500 persons, live on the upper reaches of the Cayapa River and around its sources.

000 I have never been able to understand why they are called "uncivilized" and "savage." Would it be because they dress more simply, more comfortably, more suitably and cheaply than we European fashion slaves? Or would it be because they speak their own language, unknown to us, and because they do not know how to read and write and do not stuff their heads with the dead weight taught in schools and called "education"? Or even, would it be because they have other customs and manners as well as different moral concepts?

181 One thing is certain—the Cayapa are happy people, because they are more satisfied with their lot than we Europeans, who are so demanding and feel so superior with our conceit in our sham civilization, in the clothes prescribed for us by the tyrants of "fashion" and in the "wisdom" acquired in schools.

439 They frequently come to town in small groups of five to 20
484 persons. I have seen them many hundreds of times, but again and
142 again I am delighted when I meet these small, but well-built and sturdy [282] figures. The men are not taller than 150-160 cm. (Translator--5 ft. to 5ft. 4 in.), while the women are barely 140 cm. (Translator--4 ft. 8 in.). Their skin is copper brown in color.

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114 * The author a business man, lived in Tumaco (southwest Colombia) for 35 years (1895-1930) and was German Vice-Consul for the Departamento Nariño from 1907 to 1920. Although he never actually visited Cayapa villages, he did have occasions to see and question groups of them "many hundreds of times," on their frequent visits to Tumaco. Apart from this, several of his employees have been in Cayapa villages and have given him reports. (K. Th. Preuss).

3: Barrett E-5 (1908-1909)1925
SD6 Cayapa SD6

TERRITORY OCCUPIED BY THE CAYAPA INDIANS

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3: Barrett E-5 (1906-1909)1925
SD6 Cayapa SD6

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INDIANS PROVINCE OF ESMERALDAS ECUADOR

[p. xvi 2. B)]

3: Barrett E-5 (1908-1909)1925
SD6 Cayapa SD6

THE CAYAPA INDIANS OF ECUADOR

By S. A. Barrett

TERRITORY

Geographical Situation

[3] [101] THE people known as the Cayapa Indians live at present almost wholly on the main and tributary streams of the Rio Cayapas, one of the large rivers of the northwestern part of the Province of Esmeraldas, Ecuador, and about ninety miles in a direct line north of the equator. Their [148] territory is within comparatively easy reach of the ocean, which almost all visit at least once a year.

There are a few, perhaps an aggregate of one hundred individuals, who live in several other localities, namely, on the adjacent Rio Santiago, at Pueblo Viejo, and at points along the immediate coast from the Rio Dabele, a few miles south of the town of Esmeraldas, the capital of the province, northward to the Rio Rosario, about eight miles southeast of Tumaco, in the extreme southern- [161] western part of Colombia. However, practically all the Cayapa, approximating fifteen hundred to two thousand individuals, now live on or in the immediate vicinity of the river which bears their name.

•133 The Rio Cayapas heads in the western slope of the coast range of the Andes at a point not far from Mt Cotacachi, which attains an altitude of 16,290 feet (4,966 meters). The western slope of this sierra is

3: Barrett E-5 (1908-1909)1925
SD6 Cayapa SD6

133 very abrupt; it soon gives place to the broad coastal plain which stretches thence to the ocean and which is broken only by low foot-hills in its eastern part near the higher mountains, and by short, isolated, low ranges of hills and individual hills in its western part nearer
131 the coast. The portion of this coastal plain now occupied by the Cayapa is that along the lower course of the Rio Cayapas and its tributaries. There are very few, if any, who reside as far as the lowest of the foot-hills of the coast range.

133 The lower course of the Rio Cayapas is wide, very deep, and sluggish; but immediately above tidewater it is a swift, more or less shallow stream, with numerous rapids, and in its upper course its current is so rapid that it may be ascended by canoe only with difficulty, even when not in flood. At time of very high water, on the other hand, the river is quite impassable at certain rapids, especially that known as Corriente Grande. The nature of the coastal plain is such as to produce numerous rapids, some of them of considerable extent, but, so far as it was possible to ascertain, there are no cataracts along the lower course of the river.

To the east of the coast range of the Andes, and separating it from the much higher sierra, spreads an extensive valley, at a lofty altitude, in which are situated the chief interior cities of Ecuador, including Quito (9,350 feet, or 2,850 meters), Ibarra (7,380 feet or 2,250 meters), and others. It was here, according to
[73] their traditions, that the Cayapa formerly lived. Beyond this great main range of the Andes lies the vast Amazon basin.

3: Bárrett E-5 (1908-1909)1925
SD6 Cayapa SD6

The conditions prevailing in this high interior valley offer great contrast with those under which the Cayapa now live, not only as to topography, but also as to climate, natural resources, modes of travel, the nature of their habitations, the food supply, and in various other particulars.

Climate

The climatic conditions of the territory of the Rio Cayapas are typically tropical. The temperature is equable throughout the year, the maximum day temperature ranging, so far as it was possible to determine, between 70° and 85° Fahrenheit.[1] Rains are of almost

[1] "The temperature at night ranges from 65 to 75 degrees Fahr., on cloudy days from 70 to 80 degrees Fahr., and on sunny days from 75 to 87 degrees. The latter degree I have experienced but twice in seven or eight months' residence. . . . . Although almost directly under the equator, that burning equatorial heat and those malignant fevers of which we read, are here unknown. The cause of this salubrious climate is the moisture-laden current which, sweeping by the Gallapagos islands, reaches this portion of the Ecuadorian coast and deposits its moisture as it strikes the slopes of the Andes. The clouds shield the country from the direct rays of the sun, the copious rains wash the country clean, the snows furnish cooling water, while constant evaporation tempers and cools the air."—Extract from the report of the engineer to the United States Gold Dredging and Rubber Company, on the Rio Santiago. This report was based on observations made during 1895–96. A report made by another engineer of the same company for the month of May, 1901, gives the night temperature as ranging between 60°–67°F., and the day temperature as ranging between 65°–74°F. The daily rainfall is given in this report as ranging from 0.81 inch to 0.87 inch.

3: Barrett E-5 (1908-1909)1925
SD6 Cayapa SD6

servations extending over a series of years were available, it would probably be found that the precipitation varies considerably from year to year. For instance, according to reports the winter months of 1909–10 were attended by an unprecedented rainfall. On the whole, therefore, it is safe to assume that the observations of the engineers referred to represent a fair average of the precipitation of this region.

In consequence of the great rainfall and the constant saturation of the ground, floods are frequent along all the rivers of this region. These freshets come, of course, only when there is a continuous and an unusually heavy fall of rain for several hours, or, as sometimes happens, for several days. In the latter event the Rio Cayapas rises several feet at its mouth, which is itself upward of a mile wide, and where the lowness of the bordering lands permits the stream to spread over wide areas. Farther up-stream, where the hills confine its waters, the river rises much higher; and at some points, where for considerable distances there are no low flood-plains and where the banks are steep, it rises as high as fifty feet.

As a result of such conditions there has been developed a form of pile-dwelling, the floor of which is raised from six to twelve feet above the ground. The Cayapa always endeavor to build their houses as near the river as possible, on account of their dependence on it as a means of travel and for other purposes. The floods, however, must always be taken into account in selecting a site even for such a pile-dwelling, since at times of such

4:Altschuler E-5 (1959-1960) 1965

SD6 Cayapa SD6

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ESMERALDAS PROVINCE, ECUADOR

4 Altschuler E-5 (1959-1960) 1965
ED4 Cayapa ED4

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CHAPTER I

THE CAYAPA, THEIR TERRITORY AND ECONOMY

I

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The Pacific lowlands of the province of Darien in southeastern Panama; Colombia; and the northern part of the province of Esmeraldas Ecuador, may be thought of as a geographical and cultural unit.

> If the area has any physical unity, it is to be found in the hot, humid climate and the vegetation cover of dense tropical rain forest. . . . The Area's position between 1° and 8° north of the equator gives it high year round temperatures and contributes to an almost continuous relative humidity above 90 per cent . . . Culturally the area is one chiefly because of its predominant Negroid population; because of a common way of life based mainly on subsistence agriculture, fishing, and primitive mining . . . Today nearly 80 per cent of the exact population of the lowlands is Negroid, with a large proportion of unmixed African blood. This area, then, may be considered one of the major Negroid areas of Latin America . . . The few Whites and Mestizos of the area are found mainly in the larger trading towns, mining camps, and seaports (Wagner 1960:31).

At the southern limits of the Pacific lowland area, in Ecuador, live the Cayapa Indians. Their lives and culture center about the Río Cayapa and its tributaries. At its lower reaches, the river forms a right

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[131]

angle with the Río Santiago, and together they make up the second largest drainage system in the northwestern part of the province of Esmeraldas. The confluence of the two rivers lies approximately at 1°3' north latitude, or about 90 miles due north of the equator, and 78°59' west longitude. The area is a tropical rain forest because of the very cold Humboldt Current that flows along much of the Ecuadorian coast, however, extremely dense clouds usually cover the area as far inland as the foothills of the Andes, and moderate the temperatures. They range from 65° to 75° Fahrenheit at night and from 70° to 90° during the daytime, depending upon the amount of cloud cover. Generally, the sky is a very bright overcast. When the cloud cover lessens, the sky is an intense hot blue. There are no weather stations in the Río Cayapa area, and consequently we have no readings of any significance. Barrett (1925:4) estimated the annual rainfall on the Río Santiago at between 24.83 feet to 26.46 feet. Since the distances between the Río Santiago and the Río Cayapas are not very great, Barrett's observations may reasonably be applied to the Cayapa area as well.

The low alluvial coastal area of the Cayapas-

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Santiago drainage system is fringed by a sandy beach and backed by a brackish mangrove forest swamp that extends inland for some two to four miles, at which point a slight elevation--no more than four to six feet above low tide--begins to be noticed. When one moves up past the town of Borbon, at the confluence of the two major rivers, the countryside takes on the appearance of a fairly flat plain. As one approaches the mouth of the Río Cemerones, which lies at the right hand side as one moves up the Río Cayapas, a marked change in the character of the landscape begins to emerge. Hills thickly covered with green bush and tree growth become more frequent, although they are not too precipitous, ranging from 90 to about 150 feet in height. The predominant color pattern is green, brown, and gray. The main river, especially in flood, is brown-green. Skies are generally bright gray and the vegetation on all sides fall in innumerable shades of green. Occasionally, along the lower reaches of the Río Cayapas huge clumps of water Hyacynths float like bright purple rafts towards the sea.

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Normally, the Río Cayapas flows quite gently, for the rise in altitude is slight until the actual

foothills of the Andes are reached. Thus, for example, Punta Venado, which is approximately 49 kilometers from the mouth of the river, has an altitude of 12 meters as compared to Telembí, approximately 77.5 kilometers from the river's mouth, which has an altitude of 22 meters (Wolf 1879:35). The volume of the waters carried by the rivers varies considerably. Depending upon the amount of rainfall, I have seen a rise and fall in the level of the Río Camerones of well over twenty feet within five hours. The rivers of this system cut through heavy clay soil, and the banks are not part of a flood plain but immediately form part of the hilly interior that is characteristic of the hinterland. The soil is predominantly a heavy saturated clay that is mostly reddish brown in color.

Language. The Cayapa and the Colorado Indians who live in the tropical highlands about seventy miles down the western slopes of the Andes from Quito share the distinction of being the last two aboriginal groups in western Ecuador. Their languages, although not mutually intelligible, are closely related. Recently, B. Moore worked out some phonetic correspondences between